

TWO

Useful Cases RESOLVED.

I. Whether a Certainty of being
in a State of Salvation be at-
tainable?

II. What is the Rule by which
this Certainty is to be attain-
ed?



L O N D O N :

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O.V.T.

T W O

Useful Cases RESOLVED.

Could we look into the hearts of most men, we should find some such reasonings as these, soothing them in their Vices, and lulling them asleep while they are in the ready road to Destruction. All men commit some sins or others, and most men such as my self, or as great in another kind ; and yet they believe they shall not be miserable hereafter : And therefore why should I, notwithstanding my sins, despair of Gods favour ? why should not I hope that the Infinite Mercy of God will extend it self to me also ? But then, if his Conscience tells him, that doubtless Millions have had hopes of Heaven, that never came thither ; and then puts the Question to him, What assurance, what certainty have you that this shall not be your own case ? He straitway replies, assurance indeed I have none ; but that I do not expect : for how should fallible man know certainly how God will deal with him ? but I am told that Christ dy'd for sinners, and that the Mercy of God is great ; on that therefore will I depend. And so he goes on very comfortably in his

Swearing, his Damning, his Drinking, his Cheating, or whatever other common Vices he is guilty of; and so Hopes himself into Damnation. But now these men, if they have any real concern for eternal happiness, (as I hope some of them have, by their conscientiousness in other particulars) if they did believe they could come to a certain knowledge of their spiritual condition, I cannot think but that their Consciences would not let them be at rest under such answers as these: Christ dy'd for sinners; and the mercy of God is great; which the most profligate wretches have in their mouths as well as they. No! their Consciences would be often asking them, Whether the omission of this or that duty be consistent with a state of Salvation? Whether a reverence of Gods Name; whether Sobriety and Honesty, and whatever else is commanded in the Gospel, be not the indispensable terms of everlasting Salvation? And so they would by degrees be brought to the consideration of all their ways, and an examination of all the particular actions of their lives, till by growing daily in grace, they grew up to the perfect man in Christ Jesus. And then, O the Joy! O the Comfort! O the serenity of mind they would then experience! With what assurance, with what confidence would they approach the Throne of Grace? in the words of Simeon in the Gospel. *Lord now lettest thou thy Servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy Salvation.* And when they perceive their dissolution drawing near, with what Alacrity? and with what transport of Joy would they break out into the Apostles words? *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness.*

You see how naturally this opinion of the attainableness of a certain knowledge of our spiritual state, tends

to

to a virtuous and holy life. But to prevent mistakes, I deny not, but that many men who think it impossible to frame a certain judgment of their state to Godwards, are very watchful and cautious in all their ways, carefully avoiding all those things that seem to have any contrariety to the will of God. But I say this their opinion is not so apt to produce a good life, as its contrary. For the generality of men when they are once persuaded that with all their care and industry they can never come to a certainty, they are ready to cast off all diligence, and sollicitude about the conduct of their lives ; and to rely on the Indefinite Mercy of God, and to hope the best, by which means their sins and the vicious examples of the world grow upon them ; and their Hope, the best knowledge they think they can attain to, suffers them to go on in their sins, without much interruption and disturbance.

Nay, it may be reasonably presumed, that many of the good men of this persuasion have a stronger assurance than their modesty and humility will suffer them to utter : For, what fears ? what anxieties ? what rack-ing thoughts must pierce their minds, who have the least doubt or scruple in a matter wherein they are everlastingly concerned ? What horrors ? what anguish must rend and divide their Souls upon their death-beds, who know not but that the next moment they must pass into that Lake of Fire and Brimstone that burneth for ever ?

And this has been the case of many a pious and good man : For the holy Biographers acquaint us with what hideous doubtings & terrours of conscience some of their Saints and Worthies have departed this life : and they did so, 'tis likely, for no other reason, but because a future state being then more lively and nearly represented

to them, they had not been able in their health to frame a fixed and settled judgment, whether theirs should be a state of Happiness, or eternal Misery.

Now, since the framing a certain judgment of our present spiritual state is a thing of so great use towards our leading godly, righteous, and sober lives, and of so great comfort to them that do so, both in their life-time and on their death-bed, I shall shew,

First, That men may make a certain judgment of themselves, whether they are in a state of Salvation.

Secondly, I shall lay down the Rule, by which they may make this judgment of themselves.

I know that many good and holy men are of opinion that no man can without great pride, arrogance, and presumption, say, That he is certain of his Salvation, should he die that moment : for they think the many woful and deliberate faults we are all guilty of ; the innumerable secret ones that have escaped our knowledge ; the wandrings and coldness in our Devotions ; the ill thoughts that many times arise in our minds, and the imperfectness of our best actions : These, and such-like considerations, they think, are sufficient to confound the most confident, and to baffle all pretences to an assurance. And they are ready to say, that they who are so certain of their going to Heaven, by the immodesty of their persuasions seem to be farthest from it. But if this certainty be attainable ; nay, if it be our duty to attain it ; if it be a Doctrine plainly delivered in the holy Scriptures, and therein practised by the holy men of God ; he must be a very timorous man that will be scar'd out of so useful and comfortable a truth by harsh censures, and ill-grounded reproaches.

These

These Objections shall be duly weighed afterwards.

I. But *first*, let us consider what the Scriptures say to my first Proposition, That men may, if they will deal impartially with themselves, know certainly whether ther they are in a state of Salvation. St. *John*, who wrote against the *Gnosticks* vain pretences to Knowledge, and spiritual illuminations, could not fall into the same fault himself by pretending to a knowledge that was not plain and obvious. And it is he that has told us, in his *first Epistle*, ch. 3. v. 10. that *the Children of the Devil are manifest*. Now, who calls that manifest, which no man has a certainty of? or who can think that the wicked man should have a certain knowledge of his deplorable condition, and that the good and juit man has not the comfort of knowing that he is in a safe one? The same Apostle tells us in the same verse, that *the Children of God are manifest, as well as the Children of the Devil*. And in v. 14. of the same ch. speaking of the faithful in general, he says, *We know that we are translated from death to life, because we love the brethren*. That is, v. 16. with such a love as *will make us lay down our lives for them*. And v. 24. *Hereby know we that God abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us*. That is, by the fruits of the Spirit that appear in our lives. Again, *By this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments: and he that keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected*. Now, what reason is there for any man to doubt of his own Salvation, who knows that he is translated from death to life, who knows that he is the Son of God, who knows that the love of God is perfected in him? None certainly! for the same Apostle has told us, *If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God*.

Now, the pretending uncertainty after such clearness of evidence, would better become the *Pagan Sceptick*, than the *truly humble and modest Christian*. B In

In the next place let us see what St. Paul says to this point. In the 5th. ch. of the 2d. Epist. to the Cor. 1 v. he speaks of himself thus : *For we know that if our earthly house of this Tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.* Again in the 2d. Epist. to Timothy, and the 4th. ch. how unconceivable was his joy, which broke out into these words ? *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the Righteous Judge shall give me in that day, &c.* Could these words be uttered by a man that had the least doubt, whether his life was agreeable to the will of God, or that he should not receive that eternal weight of Glory, the reward of an holy life ? If, after this evidence from the New Testament, we look backwards into the Old, we shall find good King *Hezekiah* so well satisfied in his own integrity and sincerity, that when he was a dying (and then we know that doubts and scruples are most apt to arise) he durst call upon God to take a view of his past life ; *Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.* Likewise we may observe *David* in the 17 and 18 Psalms, full of assurance and confidence, as to his own Righteousness, and future reward of it. *As for me, I shall behold thy face in Righteousness : I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness. I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from God : Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eye-sight.* I will not tire you with the examples of *Job*, *Nehemiah*, and other holy men, that have expressed the like confidence of their own Holiness and Sincerity.

Nor is this assurance and confidence the peculiar privilege of these extraordinary persons. For besides what you have already read out of *St. John* concerning all true Christians in general; and besides that the fore-mentioned holy men grounded their assurance on the sense they had of their own Integrity and Sincerity; 'tis plain from Scripture, that all persons may, nay ought to arrive to this certainty. For are we not told, *Gal. 5. That the fruits of the Spirit*, which all true Christians have, and are guided by, *are Peace and Joy*? And *St. Peter*, in the 1. ch. of his 1. *Epist.* tells the faithful he write to: *In whom*, that is, in Christ, *though you see him not, yet believing, ye rejoyce with joy unspeakable*. Now, what Joy, what Peace can there be to those who heartily believe a future life, when they the least doubt that Christ, when they shall appear before him, shall prove an enraged Judge, instead of a merciful Saviour? What person can conceive an unspeakable joy at the consideration of him, whom he knows not but the next minute he may pronounce the sentence on him of, *Go you cursed into everlasting Fire*? Besides, we are bid to *give thanks to him, and praise him*, as well as to rejoyce in him. But how can any man perform these duties from his heart, who is in an uncertainty as to his future Estate? For certainly those Mercies cannot be the Object of our unfeigned Praises and Thanksgivings, if we have reason to fear they do not appertain to us.

But were there not one Precept or Example in the whole *Bible* to prove this point, methinks the natural use of Conscience might be sufficient to clear it, unless we dare say that God has given us Consciences only to punish and torment us; for peace and comfort they could not give any reasonable and considering man, while here remains any doubt that he shall perish everlasting-

ly : and so the best of men would be Furies to themselves while living, whatever becomes of them when dead.

I know there are many ready to ask, whether the most confident man in this persuasion would be willing on his death-bed to declare his assurance of his Salvation, and with such words in his mouth to breathe his last ? But in answer to this, besides that what a man would *choose to do* is one thing, and what certainly a good man *may attain to* is another : Besides this, I say, he would tell you, that as he had lived in the practice of all Christian Virtues, so he would willingly die in the practice of the greatest ; the pardoning others, and begging Gods pardon for himself. He would tell you, that Humility, as it was the constant duty of a Christian, so it more especially became him when a stepping into the presence of God, & that he would therefore willingly depart with his eyes and heart towards Heaven, humbly imploring the Divine Mercy. And that among other reasons he was therefore certain that he should obtain it, because he asked *in Faith*, because he in no ways doubted, but that he was a proper Object of it.

As for the Objections that may be made against this Doctrine of assurance, they will either be obviated, or best answered, when I have handled my second proposition. For if a certain Rule may be laid down, whereby a man may judge infallibly of his Spiritual state, few will be troubled with the Objections. For their greatest force lies in the want of a clear Rule to guide us in our judgment. And therefore I hasten to the giving the Rule, by which a holy man may certainly judge of his Spiritual good estate, or the ill man may put himself into a good one.

II. The Rule consists of these three parts :

First, The committing of no sin, though in violence of passion, that is heinous in its Object; such as Blasphemy, Rash Swearing, Perjury, Idolatry, Murther, Cursing, Adultery, Fornication, and the like.

Or, *Secondly*, let the Object be never so small, the committing no sin that is heinous in its Cause; such as are all sins that are committed wilfully and deliberately; that is, when we both know they are against the Commands of God, and consider they are so, at the time of committing them; or we might have both known and considered this, if we had not been highly wanting to our selves; so that our Ignorance and our Inconsideration was voluntary, and so is the sin by consequence that proceeds from these: which, in the Phrase of the Schools, is, *being voluntary or deliberate in its cause*.

Thirdly, If we have been guilty of the fore-mentioned sins, the repenting of them in such a measure as we are sure will be accepted by our good and gracious God, in and through the merits of our Blessed Saviour. How and when we may be sure that our Repentance is accepted, I shall shew afterwards.

This being the Rule by which men may judge of their Spiritual state, that they may have a serious regard to it, and depend on it with safety, I account my self obliged to do these three things :

First, To prove that nothing less than the observing of the three parts of this my Rule, can give us any just assurance of Salvation.

Secondly, That the parts of this Rule, if observed, are sufficient to put any man into a state of Salvation.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, That it is plain and easie, such as all Rules ought to be, such as any man of common sense may easily and securely apply to himself.

I. *First then, That nothing less than the observing of the three parts of my Rule can give us any just assurance of Salvation.*

1. As for those sins that are heinous in their Object, they are so contrary to the first dictates of the light of Nature, or are so repugnant to the express Commands of God, that no man could possibly fall into them, who for any time immediately before had conscientiously discharged his duty, and had had a serious regard to the Laws of God: and he that has not had this regard, he was in such a wretched and hardened state, that his case had been desperate without the addition of any of these grievous Crimes. Let the provocation be never so great, and the passion never so strong, where there is any tolerable degree of tenderness in the Conscience, it could not but with-hold the person from villanies so opposite to his plain duty to God and Man, and that in the highest instances of it. I know that there have been, and there are many men of fair Characters in the world, that have committed one or other of these Crimes; but assuredly they ow'd their Religion, as their Cloaths, to the fashion: It was *that* which put it on them; their Justice, their Loyalty, and all their Morality in their other actions, was nothing but the Gallantry of the Age, or Self-interest: the fear of God, if ever they knew it, was dead and rotten in them, or else such stench and filthiness could never have come out of them. But to pass from these heinous Indeliberate Crimes, if they are capable of being Indeliberate; for I much doubt whether any Christians Conscience is so slow and stupid,

stupid, as at the time of doing them not immediately to admonish him, not to stare in his face, and tell him, that he is a dashing himself against the Natural or the Revealed will of God. And if his Conscience told him so much, then certainly they were done with consideration and deliberation. And had he staid a month or a year before the perpetration of them, his Conscience might have suggested other Arguments, but not greater, nor more proper to dissuade him. 'Tis true, Time 'tis probable would have abated the strength of his passion. But no man is virtuous for not having a temptation, but for resisting it; nor is he a true Christian, that does not resist the greatest. But enough has been said to shew such heinous Crimes, however committed, to be inconsistent with Salvation, especially with a Security of it.

2. And so I pass (as I said) to wilful and deliberate sins; such as we know to be sins, and at the time of committing them recollect that they are so. And these also, nay one act of these, let them be never so small, very much endanger a mans Salvation; for the *Popish Casuists*, by their distinction of sins Venial into sins Light in their Nature, though acted willingly, such as Foolish Jestings, Officious Lying, small Excesses, and the like; and Light in their Object, such as stealing a Pin, a Farthing, or any Trifle: By these distinctions, I say, they make the Salvation of their followers very doubtful, if they do not utterly destroy it. And it is Security and Assurance that I contend for. Now, can the allowing ones self in disobedience to any of the commands of God, consist with an Obedience to him *with all our heart, and with all our soul*? Can he that deliberately breaks the least of the Commands, assure himself that he shall not be the least in *the Kingdom of Heaven*; that is, not be

be at all admitted into it? Can that Soul that sinneth presumptuously, though in never so small a matter, be certain that he *reproacheth not the Lord, and that he shall not be cut off?* contrary to Numb. 15. 30 v. He that will not part with these *handfuls of barley and morsels of bread*, for his duty to God, seems to have but little desire of Heaven, and I am afraid will have less of it for his Portion. But to leave these miserable Guides of Souls, that thus unwarily endeavour to widen the *narrow way* that leads to life, till they fall into the *broad road* that leadeth to destruction: For the indulging ones self in the smaller sins, lessens the fear of God, and the habit of doing well, and so draws us into more and greater sins. But leaving these miserable Guides, I shall betake my self more closely to the proof of the second part of my Rule, viz.

That one deliberate sin will endanger our eternal happiness. I might say, will certainly destroy it; but that is more than I am engaged to prove at present.

Does not St. Paul in his 1 Ep. to the Cor. 6 ch. tell us, that *neither Fornicators, nor Idolaters, nor Adulterers, nor Effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with Mankind, nor Thieves, nor Covetous, nor Drunkards, nor Revilers, nor Extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God.* Some, I know, dispute, whether a single, though deliberate act, can give us one of these denominations? In most of them 'tis own'd it will; but why it should not in all, in the sight of God, I can see no reason. But that this pretence may not deceive us, we are told by the same Apostle in the 5 to the Gal. speaking of the works of the flesh, *Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanness, Lasciviousness, Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies, Envyings, Murthers, Drunkenness, and* such-

suck-like. We are told, that *those that do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.* Now these words, *They which do such things,* relate to single Actions, as well as to Habits ; and the doers of these things are debarred the Kingdom of Heaven. And then the *suck-like* that follows this long Catalogue of sins, shews that it is not only these species of sins, but the rest which fall under the denomination of sin, which it would have been endless to have enumerated, are subject to the like dreadful penalty. And there is good reason to believe it, for in the *first Epistle* of *St. John*, ch. 3. v. 6. we are told, *Whoever abideth in God, sinneth not :* and verse 8. *If he does, he is no longer a Child of God, but of the Devil.* Accordingly, sin is defined by the Schoolmen to be *an aversion from God, and a cleaving to the Creature.* Now, that the Apostle means single acts as well as habits, is plain from the expression it self, *He that sinneth,* which is applicable to acts as well as habits, and from the design of the Apostle in writing this Epistle, which was to dissuade men from all sin, ch. 2. v. 1. *These things write I unto you, that you sin not.* Now, who will offer to say that the Apostles design was not to dissuade from single acts as well as habits ? And yet he saith, *He that sinneth, is of the Devil ;* that is, voluntarily and deliberately, as I shall make appear afterwards. Besides, let us consider that under the old Law *Saul* was cut off for sparing an *Agag* and the fat Beast against the exprefs Command of God ; let us consider that that man that but once carried a bundle of Sticks on the Sabbath-day, was put to death without mercy, and that there was no expiation allow'd for sins, how small soever the object was, if committed knowingly and willingly ; but in the words of *St. James*,

c. 2. *He that was guilty of one point, was guilty of all.* Not that he formally broke every Command, but that the event was the same; he was as certainly punished with death, as if he had violated every particular. And this with good reason; for in so doing he sinned against That which only could engage him to the observance of the whole, the Love of God, and an earnest desire to please him.

If this was the severity of the *Jewish Law*, and every transgression and disobedience received the just recompence of reward, and the wilful offender died without Mercy: how shall we escape, if we neglect so great means of Salvation? which has been brought down to us, not by Angels, as the *Mosaical Law* was, but by the Son of God. This is not mine, but the Apostles Argument, in his Epistle to the *Hebrews*, and the other was made by St. *James* himself, and therefore they are the more carefully to be heeded.

I fore-see that there are many who will not easily be persuaded to think so hardly of one wilful sin, (for 'tis a troublefom thing to be condemned by ones own Conscience) and that therefore they will interpose as to the Arguments drawn from the Old Law; That no man, unless he dies in the very moment of committing a wilful sin, is immediately damned for it, as they were immediately put to Death under the Old Law for one wilful transgression: for the Grace of the Gospel has brought an Expiation for the most grievous crimes, and shewed us a way by Repentance to avoid their punishment. But all that I urged the former passages for, was to shew, That the Gospel teaches us, that to every

every wilful disobedience, to the guilt of any one point now, Eternal death is as certainly due in the next Life, as a Temporal one among the *Jews* was due in this. And that therefore all persons ought as carefully to avoid every wilful offence under the Gospel, as the *Jews* were obliged to avoid every wilful transgression of their Law; in which the Penalty was not so great, nor was the Discovery so certain. As for the refuge of Repentance which is allow'd now against an Eternal death, and was not ordinarily allow'd the *Jews* against a Temporal one, of this under my next Head: But if we make the Grace of the Gospel an inlet to our sins, we highly provoke Gods Justice by thus abusing his Mercy; And when we make use of it to take off the force, not of mine, but the two Apostles Arguments, we are not followers of their Doctrine, but of our own deceitful Lusts, and carnal Reasonings.

Besides these reasons from Scripture, there is a Natural one, and that a very great one, that shews the danger that is in every wilful sin. The General Rules of our duty relating either to God, our Neighbour, or our selves, are such as tend to our Profit and our Interest, to our Credit and Reputation, to our Prudent Pleasure, and our Health; And then he that looks no farther than this life, if discreet, would carefully observe them. And therefore the ordinary observance of our duty, cannot distinguish us from such a person as this, nor give us a securer title to happiness than the *Children of this world* have, *that are wise in their Generation*. But sometimes it falls out, and that perhaps to try us, that in particular instances our Duty inter-

feres with our Profit, our Credit, or our Ease. And then we have the greatest opportunities of experiencing whether our hearts are sound towards God; Then is our day of trial; Then may we know whether we *love God with all our hearts*, and whether we are willing to *forsake Father or Mother, Brother or Sister*, whatever is most dear to us, for the sake of our Blessed Saviour. If in these cases we fail of our duty, and prefer our present concerns before the Commands of God, the Devil may justly say, *'tis not for nought that we served God, Job 1. 9.* We pursued our worldly Interests, while we flattered our selves we served the Lord. And then who can safely depend on such an obedience, as is thus liable to be reproached by his Accuser?

I know it may be objected, That a Reverend Divine has told us in his Directions how we may judge of our Spiritual state, *That if the General course of our Actions be a doing of Righteousness, though we are sometimes born down by the Violence of Temptations, the Grace of the Gospel accepts of this Imperfect, but Sincere Obedience.*

But (1.) What Assurance does he give, that this will be sufficient to any mans Salvation? He says, that an Unsinning Obedience is impossible, and that therefore somewhat less than a perfect Obedience is necessary, (if any man is saved.) But is there no Medium betwixt a Perfect Obedience, and that in the General course of our lives? Does not That Obedience which is spotted only with sins of Infirmary, and which keeps the good Christian from all Wilful and Deliberate Sins, come nearer to an Unsinning Obedience, than

than that which is sometimes born down by the Violence of Temptations?

(2dly.) This Rule is not clear enough to direct any man in so weighty a matter; For what one man calls Obedience as to the General course of our Actions, another will not call so. And he that is but sometimes Drunk, and Cheats but now and then, and is but seldom guilty of Fornication, or any other sin, may comfortably commit them, so that he does not turn them into an Habitual Practice. And I verily believe, should I appeal to most mens Consciences, that are not extremely Vicious, they would confess, that they slacken the reins now and then to a Delightful Lust, or a Profitable Sin, because they are of Opinion, that if in the Generality of their Actions they observe their Duty, these not common Intermissions, will not endanger their Salvation.

I think I need not oppose Authority against Authority, since the Uncertainty and Looseness of the Rule is sufficient to confute it. And if the Arguments by which I have proved the danger that is in every Wilful Sin, be Good, This Rule must needs be Deceitful and Erroneous.

As for the other Species of Wilful Sins, that are Wilful in their Cause, when we have neglected such means of Knowledge as were consistent with our Circumstances, and so chosen our Ignorance; or when we had time and leisure to have consider'd our actions before we did them, but we would run rashly and inconsiderately upon them. Such Ignorance and Inconsideration

deration are so far from excusing an Action, that they highly aggravate it. They are marks that our Spirit is strangely alienated from God; They shew that we love Darknes more than Light, and that we regard not the conforming our Actions to the Commands of God; That we would *not consider our ways, lest we should turn our feet unto his Testimonies.* And what will be the effect of such gross Heedlesnes and affected Ignorance, I leave every mans own Conscience to tell him.

Give me leave to back what I have delivered on this Head, with the Authority of the *Whole Duty of Man*, a Book deservedly in most peoples hands. *Chap. 6. Sect. 21.* we are told, *That whosoever continues in any one Wilful Sin, is not in Gods favour, nor can be, if he so die, hope for any mercy at his hand.*

But now the man that is conscious to himself of any Wilful Sin, is ready to say in his heart, Though every Wilful Sin is Damnable, yet is it not so to them that have forsaken it, 'tis not so upon Repentance, and That I have performed, and therefore this terrible Discourse does not affect me. And blessed for evermore be the Infinite Mercy of our Gracious God, that has declared his readiness to receive the Returning Prodigal, to receive us to Pardon, though we have sinn'd with an high hand, and Presumptuously rebelled against Him; That has extended his Expiatory Sacrifice, not only to our Sins of Ignorance and Infirmitie, as under the Old Law, but to our Sins against our Knowledge, to our Voluntary and Presumptuous Sins.

(3dly.) But

(3dly.) But this confident person, that has lately been guilty of one Wilful Sin, must be told, That before he can give Peace and Quiet to his Soul, he ought to be certain that his Repentance has been of such a nature, and in such measure, as will be accepted with God; which is the Third part of my Rule, *by which a man may judge of his Spiritual State.*

But he that has lately been guilty of One Wilful Sin, cannot be sure that his Repentance is accepted by God. For though he may be sensible of his fault, and the danger it has brought him into; though he has several times begged Gods pardon, and, if he be of a soft and tender temper, with groans and tears too; though he has made satisfaction and restitution for whatever injury he has done by his sin, (all which particulars are absolutely required of every True Penitent;) His sin being lately committed, he cannot have had sufficient experience of the Firmness and Soundness of his Repentance. 'Tis a strict Obedience in all our Voluntary actions, to all the Commands of God, and that when our Interest and our Pleasure run counter to them; 'Tis such a strict and Universal Obedience that is the only Touch-stone to distinguish between the True and the False Repentance. For how often have we found our Resolutions of amendment prove ineffectual? And how can we be sure, unless by experience, that our present Resolutions shall not be as unsuccessful as our Former? We may truly and sincerely resolve to please God for the future, as the Child, while the delicious Bait is absent, may heartily promise his Father, that he will never offend him again;

But

But how know we that this our resolution is not built on a Sandy Foundation, too weak to support it, when the *Rains, the Floods, and the Winds*, the violence of Temptations shall assault it? I doubt not but St. Peter did not dissemble with his Master, when he told him so briskly, *Though all men should forsake him, yet would not he*; and yet 'tis upon Record how shamefully he flew off upon Tryal. Therefore the strength and goodness of our Desires and Resolutions are best known by our Actions. Virtuous Habits in the Soul are to be discern'd certainly only by the Acts they produce. This makes Divines commonly say, that no man can be sure that a Death-bed-repentance is valid. This made St. Austin say, *Lib. 50. Hom. 41. That a Christian living well, goes hence securely. He that repents, and afterwards lives well, goes hence securely. He that repents at last, and is absolved, whether he goes hence securely, I am not secure.* Accordingly Salvian says, *Sera cautione spondere aliquid temerarium est. It would be a piece of Rashness and Presumption to give any assurance to a Death-bed-Penitent.* This made the ancient Church, as we learn from St. Cyprian, refuse the *Viaticum*, the Sacrament, to persons that deferred their Repentance till death; for these had given no proof of their amendment. And when, after the decay of Ecclesiastical Discipline, they gave it to such, it was *de bene esse*, that it might do as much good as it could; but what that would be, God only knew, to man it was wholly doubtful, as we are informed in this famous expression: *Pœnitentiam dare possumus, securitatem non possumus: We can give them the Sacrament, but that they shall receive the benefit design'd by it, we cannot assure them.* We have but one Instance of a dying Penitent, of the sincerity and sufficiency of whose Repentance

tance we are ascertain'd ; 'tis that of the Thief on the Cross ; and our assurance of this is owing to nothing less than the Testimony of Him who was God as well as Man.

He that, notwithstanding what has been said, dares venture on a known sin, hoping to make all well again by a speedy Repentance ; I would desire him to consider, whether if he had a Son or a Servant that should offend him, especially several times, presuming on his kindness and good nature ; whether, I say, he would easily and quickly pardon such a Son or a Servant ? *Secondly*, whether such a person would not shew himself to be of a very base, ungrateful, and disingenuous temper, and not to be reformed in a little time, or with little pains ? Now, why should we foolishly imagine, that God will suffer his Mercy to be abused any more than Man ? Or that such a behaviour towards God, does not argue so base a disposition, as is not quickly to be put off ? Let such a person but represent the Trumpet sounding, the Son of Man on the Throne, all the Heavenly Host surrounding him, and the Books open'd, and Sentence ready to be pronounced ; and then let him consider, whether he could depend on that Mercy which he had so lately abused, and whether, for all his imaginary Repentance, he would not with amazement and horror be frequently casting his eyes on that Stain, which he had so lately contracted. Such a Prolepsis of the Day of Judgment would shew us there is much more danger in one Wilful Sin lately committed, than we are apt to fancy, while we put that day far from us.

But if he that has been guilty of one heinous Indeliberate sin, or of one Wilful one, in never so small a matter, be in so dangerous a case : What shall we say to the Oppressor and Defrauder of Mankind, to the Customary Swearer, to the Damner, to the Drunkard, to the Fornicator, to all that wallow in any one habitual sin ? Assuredly there is *μὴ γὰρ χάσμα*, a great Gulf between Them and Happiness ; They are as far from it, as Heaven is from Hell.

II. But not to grieve our selves any longer with so melancholly a Subject, I shall hasten to give Comfort and Assurance to all pious persons, that for a long time have lived conscientiously in the discharge of their duty, and have carefully avoided all Wilful and Deliberate Sins. And the giving this assurance is the *proving the sufficiency of my Rule*, which was the second thing to be done.

For These are they that have brought forth works meet for Repentance ; That have put away the evil of their doings, by ceasing to do Evil, and by learning to do Well. If. I. 16, 17. They desire nothing more than their Eternal Salvation, and their constant Resolutions are for the Observance of all the Commands of God ; and then the Conformity of their Outward Actions prove that these their Desires and Resolutions are sincere and strong. So that if they look into the Inward Man, they find themselves renewed in the Spirit of their Minds ; and if they take a view of their Outward Actions, they find nothing of the Old. *Now when the wicked forsakes his Way, and the unrighteous his Thoughts ; when he*

he turneth from the Wickedness that he has committed, and doth that which is Lawful and Right, we are assured by Ezekiel, that He shall save his Soul alive; and by Isaiah, 55. 7. That God will have mercy upon him, and will abundantly pardon. Here it will be asked, what time is necessary for the making this experience of ones self? But 'tis impossible for one man to determine this for another. Tryals and Temptations are not the same to all men in the same space of time; nor is all true Christians Intenseness of Obedience equal: for there are degrees even in Sincerity, as there are degrees of Happiness, suitable to them. Wherefore every mans own Conscience must tell him, whether he has been diligent to learn his Duty, and has had time to go stedily through All or the Main branches of it as they arose: Whether he has daily made the Natural and Revealed Will of God the Rule of all his Words and Actions, even when his Pleasure or his Worldly Interest tempted to the contrary. Now he that has done thus, may be reasonably presumed proof against the fiery Tryal, and the highest Temptations, if it be his happiness to suffer for Righteousness-sake. And then, This is the man, and This only, that upon the Examination of his Life, and the Consideration of his Ways, can give Peace and Quiet to his Soul; that can say with St. Paul, *If our earthly house of this Tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, Eternal in the Heavens.*

But it will not be sufficient to the Doubting Christian to have thus proved my Rule, unless I also answer his scruples: For he will put in, and say, I am afraid God has made more things necessary than your Rule compri-

ses ; my own Conscience condemns me, though You do not. I many times have wandring thoughts, and want zeal in my Devotions ; I fear I have many secret sins to answer for ; I often offend through Ignorance and Inconsideration, as I many times discover, but too late ; and some times ill thoughts and imaginations arise in my mind : So that I am all over polluted with sin, and St. John has told me, *He that sinneth is of the Devil, and not of God.*

These, and such-like sins, if they proceed from our sloth and negligence, if we do not strive and struggle against them, they seem to have the consent of our Wills, and so may prove Damnable : but otherwise they hardly deserve the name of Moral Actions. They are not chosen by our wills, they necessarily flow from the Imperfections of our Natures, and so are not the proper Object of Laws, nor of Rewards and Penalties. But to speak to the Objections separately : Our Zeal & Warmth in any Action does depend in a great measure on the general temper of our bodies, and the particular one we are then in, when we undertake any Action : which temper varies with the Weather, and an hundred other Uncertain causes. The holiness of our Lives, and an humble dependance on God in all our Concerns, does recommend our Prayers more than the Warmth of our Affections, or the Volubility of our Tongues. As for our Thoughts, 'tis no wonder they are desultory and wandring, since the Soul of man cannot bear a continual stretch and intention, since the variety of Objects are apt to distract us, and as it were compel us to mind them. Lastly, since the Multiplicity of Affairs and Business which God himself has imposed on us, will recur to our
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minds without our seeking. Next, for our sins of Ignorance and Inconsideration ; if we have been honestly industrious to learn our duty, and watchful to prevent a surprise where we discern'd danger of it, the effects of these are unavoidable, and though in themselves they are deviations from the Laws of God, they shall never be imputed as such to us. No good man will punish another for that which was inevitable. Then for our ill Thoughts, when by the looseness of our lives we do not give occasion to them, they have their Natural causes, as well as the former : If we do not indulge our selves in them, if we do not take pleasure in them, but dismiss them with a *Get ye behind me Satan, you savour not the things of God*, they are the Objects of our Virtues, and not our Vices, they are proofs of a resolute and steady Obedience. Wherefore 'tis plain that the Apostle in these words, *He that sinneth is of the Devil*, meaneth not such Actions as are owing to the weakness of our Nature, but to the Vitiosity of our Wills ; Such as the *Gnosticks* allow'd themselves in, against whom the Apostle directs these words, and the rest of this *Epistle*. All that the best of Christians can do, as to these sins of Infirmary, is to humbly acknowledge them, to strive against them, and to beg Gods pardon for them in general. More than this is impossible, and that this is enough all Divines agree.

The doubting Christian will reply, I have indeed used some endeavours to correct the coldness of my Prayers, to restrain all evil thoughts, to better inform my Judgment, and to prevent all Inconsiderateness : but I am sensible I have not used my utmost endeavours ; and this, if I loved God as I ought, *with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my might*, I should have done, & so still I stand condemn'd by my own Conscience. But

But certainly loving God with all our Heart, and with all our Might, is not with all our Power strain'd to the utmost possibility; for this would not be to prescribe a Law to Mankind, but immediately to put them All, how Innocent soever, on the Rack, and that the severest. For the stretching the faculties of the Soul to their utmost possibility, is much more grievous than the distention of the Members of the Body. Besides, there is no way of judging when we have done all that is possible, if we take it in this strict sense. Neither *David*, who is said to *have followed God with all his heart*, *1 Kings 14.8.* Nor *Zecharias* and *Elizabeth*, and others who are said to *have walked in all the Commands of God*, in this of loving God with all the heart, as well as the rest, ever performed it in this sense. We are told indeed that *Jehu took no heed to walk in the Laws of God with all his heart, because he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam*, *2 Kings 10.31.* We are told, *that they that worshipped strange Gods, did not return to the Lord with all their heart*, *1 Sam. 3.7.* But we are no where told that he who is careful to avoid all Wilful sins, that will forsake his Father or his Mother, his Brother or Sister, nay his own Life, for the sake of God; that is, rather than sin against him Knowingly & Willingly: We are no where told, that This man does not love God with all his heart. Nay 'tis probable this way and degree of expressing our Love to the Second Person of the Trinity now, is but a more clear and distinct expression of the Love that was owing to the First Person in the Trinity under the Old Law. *David*, who best knew what it was to love God with all ones heart, because himself was an Example of it, has taught us, *That they seek the Lord with their whole Heart, who do no Iniquity*, *Psal. 119. 2, 3.* that is, Heinous and Deliberate

berate sins. For *David* knew that himself and all Mankind would always have their secret sins, their sins of Ignorance and Inadvertency.

But the Objector will rejoyn in the third place, Tho' I am conscious to my self of no wilful Dämning sin, yet for ought I know I am extremely guilty before the great Searcher of Hearts. And *St. Paul* in this is my Precedent, in *1 Cor. 4. 4.* *Though he knew nothing of himself, yet, he says, thereby he was not justified.* Wherefore I must go down with sorrow to my Grave : If I am saved at last, it must be by *working out my Salvation with fear and trembling.* And so great a man as the forementioned Apostle says, *He counted not himself to have apprehended, but forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things that are before, he pressed towards the Mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,* Phil. 3. 13.

But you have read the words of *St. John*, *If your hearts condemn you not, then have you confidence towards God.* You have seen *St. Paul's* great confidence & assurance, *Henceforth is laid up for me a Crown of Glory.* Wherefore unless we will make *St. Paul* contradict himself, and one Apostle to disagree with the other, there is but little force in the Objection from the *1st.* to the *Cor.* If you consult the place, you will find him to speak to some that were very apt to censure him, as to the discharge of his Apostolical Function. And to reprove them for the rashness of their censures, he tells them how difficult it was to pass a true Judgment. For says he, *I know my own Intentions, my secret Thoughts, and all my Carriage, and Behaviour in this matter, and am not conscious to my self of any failing in it ; yet I am not hereby justified, for some slip & omission may be undiscovered by me, and so I may not be*

*be wholly Innocent. And if I may be thus deceived in my own Affairs, how much more likely is it that you should : and therefore judge not. The whole Context runs thus : But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of You, or mans judgment ; yea I judge not my own self. For I know nothing by my self, yet am I not hereby justified : But He that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come. But does he say, Tho I know nothing by my self, yet I may be so far Criminal, as to have brought my self into a state of Damnation ? This would come up to the point, but nothing less will. To go on then to the other parts of the Objection ; 'Tis true St. Paul advises the *Philippians* to work out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling ; but this imports only, that they should be careful and diligent in the discharge of their Duty ; just as the same Apostle bids *Servants* to obey their Masters with Fear and Trembling ; that is, to be careful to please them. Surely he does not mean, they could not know when they do so. As for that other passage, that St. Paul counted not himself to have apprehended, but look'd towards the things that were before, pressing towards the Mark : What is this, but that he endeavour'd to grow & persevere in his virtuous course, lest by his alter-negligence he might lose the Prize.*

Thus I have given a particular Answer to the principal Scruples and Objections that may arise in some good persons minds. And now in short I shall give a General One to them altogether, which will deaden the force of many more, that are not so considerable, nor so close to my present Subject, the mentioning of which would have swell'd this Tract beyond its designed bounds.

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My general Answer is this : Those considerations that would have overthrown the Peace of Conscience, the Joy and the Comfort of the most Godly man that ever was, and that would make our Saviours Yoke extreme uneasie, they ought not to move any man. Nay they themselves are faults if they do disturb us ; for they lessen our Notion of Gods and our Saviours Mercy, and detract from the Goodness of the Covenant we are under. Not but that a good man ought to strive against these smaller sins, nay if he does not, he will find they will lead him insensibly into greater : But if he disquiets himself because he has not wholly conquer'd them, he is to blame. Since there are degrees of Glory and Happiness, the higher our Performances, the greater our Improvements of our Talents ; the less we have of Infirmities, the nearer we approach to the Perfections of the Almighty, and consequently the more we shall partake of the Happiness, with which he is blessed, for evermore. But if we do not reach the utmost height that Humane Nature is capable of, (though that were to be wished) if we bury not our Talent in a Napkin, if we are not among the bad and slothful Servants, we shall as certainly enter into the Joy of our Lord, as he that had the Ten Cities allotted him, though by reason of our smaller proficiency, we shall have a lower place assign'd us. In the Invisible, as well as the Visible Heavens, there are Stars of a greater and a smaller Magnitude, and these are as much in Heaven, though they are not so High.

Thus I hope I have given satisfaction to the Doubts and Scruples that men are apt to question their Salvation upon, tho' they have lived for a long time in a conscientious discharge of their duty, without the commission of

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any one Wilful Sin : And by doing of this I have proved, even to the Doubting Christian, that the Rule I have lay'd down is sufficient to secure any mans Salvation. What has been said may serve also as a proof that we may certainly know our State to Godwards, if we will carefully endeavour it. For 'tis chiefly the fore-going Objections, that make men think it difficult, if not impossible.

But there remains one sort of Objections against this Certainty, and perhaps necessary to be answer'd : They are taken from the words of the *Prov. c. 20. v. 9. Who can say I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin?* As also from those of the *Psalmist, In thy sight no man living shall be justified.* And of *Job. 9. 20. If I justify my self, my own mouth shall condemn me.* These and many more such passages signifie only this, That we are all sinners, and *that if we say we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the truth is not in us ;* And that therefore we all stand in need of the Mercy of God, and the Merits of our Saviour. Now, if good men may certainly know that both these belong to them, as they may by the holiness of their Lives, the fore-going Texts may teach us humility, and the necessity of Faith in Christ, but are far from overthrowing the Certainty I contend for.

III. There remains only one thing more to prove my Rule to deserve that name, which is, *that it is plain and easie, such as every man of common sense may apply to himself ;* which is the third and last thing to be done. Of which briefly.

If we have been guilty of any Crime, through the violence of our Passions, we are so far from being ignorant of it, that it will haunt us day and night; it will speak louder than the noises of the world, and will thrust it self into our most secret retirements; it will surprize us like the Passion that occasion'd it, and we cannot get rid of it, would we never so fain. Then for wilful sins, they are of like nature, they will be constantly upbraiding us, and flying in our faces. And then if we have any sense of Gods Displeasure, if we have any serious Concern for Eternal Happiness, they will Both hunt us from place to place, till they have driven us into the shelter of a severe Repentance. And this being done, who cannot tell, whether for a long time together he has diligently avoided the like dangerous sins? Whether he has lived Righteously, Soberly and Godly in this present world, not offending against his Duty to God or Man? He that has lived thus, why should he the least doubt of his good Estate? why should not he give Peace and Comfort to his Soul, since he has a Merciful God to deal withal, since at the Right hand of God he has an High Priest, that feels his Infirmities, and who has also told him, *that his Yoke is easie, and his Burden is light?*

From what has been said, 'tis plain, that they who obey God, as to the generality of their Actions, but, yet for the gratifying of a Lust, or the promoting an Interest, now and then venture upon a sinful Action; 'tis plain, I say, that they can make no advantage of this my Rule, but to let them see the dangerousness of their Condition. For they are still out of the Kingdom of Heaven, though they are not far from it. For they resemble not the Merchant that parted with all he had to purchase
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the Pearl of great price ; they seem not to prefer Christ before all things, nor to esteem their own Happiness hereafter, above any Temporal and Sensual Good. But that we may manifest our selves to be such not only to our selves, but to all the world, let us be careful to learn the whole compass of our Duty, and then diligent in the Performance of it, not falling into any either Heinous or Deliberate sin, and striving against our Infirmities, tho' we can never wholly subdue them. For which end, let us beg the God of Peace, that brought again from the Dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the Sheep, by the Blood of the Everlasting Covenant, to make us perfect in every good Work to do his Will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be Glory for ever and ever.

F I N I S.
